



Al-Risala 1996

September-October

(221:10)

Today and Tomorrow

Resolution No. 3379 was passed by the United Nations in 1975 in which it held Zionism synonymous with racism. This resolution was also supported by India.

For many years the Jewish lobby and the USA made constant efforts to have this resolution overturned in the United Nations. But the circumstances were not favourable for, thanks to the influence of the Soviet Union, the entire East Block continued to give its backing to this resolution.

But with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Jewish lobby and the USA managed to find a long sought-after opportunity. On December 17, 1991 the United Nations tabled the repeal of this resolution in the General Assembly of the United Nations. With the support of the entire East Block, including India, this resolution was repealed by 111 votes as against only 25 in opposition. There were 166 members of the United Nations at the time, of whom the remaining number abstained from voting.

Lawrence Eagle Burger, the American representative observed: The era which produced resolution 3379 has passed into history.

From 1975 to 1991 the Soviet Union, enjoying the position of super power, had rallied the support of various countries against the United States. Now with America being the sole remaining super power, this resolution, passed sixteen years ago, was scrapped by it.

Whoever comes into power attempts to write the history of his own choice, in spite of the fact that no one in this world enjoys a permanent position. Here, someone is granted sixteen years, while others are granted just sixteen days. Yet everyone, powerful or powerless, remains blissfully unaware of the ephemerality of his position.

Observing Silence is Necessary

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam observed: One who believes in God and the Last Day should either speak words of goodness or keep quiet.

It is true that keeping quiet is as important as speaking. Yet on certain occasions speaking becomes extremely important. That is why according to a hadith, one who does not tell the truth at the right moment is called a 'dumb Satan'. However, there are many occasions when observing silence is more proper and more important.

One example of how essential it is to observe silence is provided by an incident at the battle of Uhud. The Prophet having been injured, fell down in a cave, out of sight of the people. His enemies proclaimed that he had been killed. The companions of the Prophet were in disarray. In the meantime one of the companions caught sight of the Prophet and exclaimed, 'Here is the Prophet!' At that moment the Prophet motioned him to keep quiet so that the enemy would remain ignorant of his being alive.

Another instance is cited in the hadith which says that asking the assembly to keep quiet while the Imam is giving a sermon is an absurd act, for that in itself would amount to making a noise.

This principle of keeping silence at meetings between individuals too is worth observing, but when the matter pertains to the whole community it assumes far greater importance. At a delicate moment the observance of silence by a leader prevents a riot from taking place, while an ill-timed speech by a leader can lead to a full scale riot, leaving in its trail hundreds of innocents slaughtered and property worth crores of rupees being burnt to ashes. It is in this sense that Sister Consolata has observed:

The greatest number of failings in a community come from breaking the rule of silence.

Two Methods

As the legend goes, the wind and the sun once challenged one another as to which one was more powerful than the other. The argument went on and on indefinitely. Then both decided to demonstrate their respective powers on an object, and whoever won was to be acknowledged the more powerful.

It was early in the morning, and a person covered with a blanket was seen walking in a field. Both the sun and the wind said, "Let us test our strength on this person. The one who manages to remove his blanket from his body will be held the more powerful." The wind, first in the field, blew harder and harder until a gale was let loose. But when the man saw the storm approaching, he became afraid of his blanket flying away in the wind so, as the wind started blowing harder and harder, he went on tightening his blanket more and more. Thus the wind failed to separate the blanket from the man's body. Next, the sun came on the scene to show its strength. Instead of a rapid action, it opted for a slow and steady one. It gradually began spreading its rays in the atmosphere. The man started feeling somewhat hot, so he loosened his blanket. Then, when he became very hot with the sun's rays, he removed the blanket from his body, folded it and hung it around his neck.

This allegory tells us the difference between gentle and harsh action. The way of gentleness in dealings leads us to success while the harsh way leads us to failure.

By gentleness one can win peoples' hearts. Harshness only drives people further away. By forgiving someone for his ill-treatment, one awakens in him a sense of shame. Whereas by returning evil for evil, a reaction of revenge and retaliation is produced. As the hadith tells us, God rewards gentleness and not harshness. That is, God's blessings come to one who behaves gently instead of harshly.

From Mosque to Mosque

An Arabic journal, Ad-Dirasat Al-Islamia (July-Sept 1955) published from Islamabad in a detailed report of Islam in France, tells of how a prominent French man, Le Cleek, now called Daniel Yousuf Le Cleek, accepted Islam. He subsequently, associated himself with the Tablighi Jamaat and later along with a group from this Jamaat, he performed Hajj on foot.

Starting from England he passed through various European countries, then passing through Turkey and Jordan, he reached Saudi Arabia. This long journey was undertaken from one mosque to another until he reached the Ka'bah, the holiest of the mosques.

This tells us of an important reality. One special secret of success of the Tablighi Jamaat lies in its utilizing the present structure existing in the community. Had they made it a condition that the existing political system should first be conducive to the acceptance of Islam before they started their religious mission, they would have failed to make a positive start for an indefinite period of time. But when they started their work making use of the existing structure of the mosque, there was no delay whatsoever as the mosques were already scattered all over the world in very large numbers.

There are two ways of working in this world, one through politics and the other by *da'wah*. The political method lays the most stress on changing the political system, as it holds that so long as the reins of political power are not in one's own hands, no positive work can be accomplished. On the contrary, *da'wah* finds ways of working without the abolition of the present system. In this way, the starting point can be available from day one; and each step taken means definite progress in this field.

(223:12)

On the brink of history

The American war of Independence was fought from 1775 to 1783. Having seen its consequences some of America's leaders subsequently began to advocate peaceful methods of gaining political ends instead of violence. One of these was the second American president, John Adams, who came to be known as a non-political politician.

When Britain under the Paris treaty gave the US its freedom in 1783, its history radically altered course. Now the maximum importance began to be given to education, scientific research, industry, city planning and character building of the new generations.

The same happened in the case of Japan. Up to the end of the second world War, Japan had followed the path of militancy. But its experiences during the war led it to change its priorities. Now militancy was totally abandoned. Instead, all attention was diverted to the field of education, with progress in science and technology as its target. As a result of adopting this reverse course, as they called it, the Japanese saw dramatic changes within a period of forty years.

This stage of taking the reverse course comes to every nation. In the event, it is those who show the ability to adapt themselves to changing sets of circumstances who are successful. Those who fail to adapt are doomed to failure. The US and Japan both provide examples of the benefits of adopting this reverse course. India, on the contrary, sets the opposite example. After independence, Mahatma Gandhi wanted India to follow this reverse course, but it failed to do so, hence the delay in its emergence as a developed country.

For the Muslims too this hour has come. Because of continuing to bear grudges against others they had futilely adopted a policy of militancy over a long period. But now it is high time to abandon externally directed policy and focus instead on internal matters. That is, they must first admit their own shortcomings and then direct their full attention towards their own construction. This being the only solution to the problems faced by the Muslims, they ought wholeheartedly to adopt this policy.

Progress in Inter-Religious Dialogue

Religious differences have always existed between people. That is why interreligious dialogue has been found in one form or the other since ancient times. Fourteen hundred years ago the Prophet of Islam held in Medina a three-religion conference – in modern terminology, a trialogue – to exchange views on religious issues.

Such attempts have repeatedly been made in history. The circumstances that unfolded following the second world war led the Christian Church, in particular, to pay great attention to this matter. Through its continuous efforts dialogues of this nature are regularly being held in various countries, between Muslims and Christians in particular. I too have had the occasion to participate in several of these dialogues.

These efforts have borne fruit, at least partially. For Instance, it is as a result of these efforts that on the one hand, a Church has appeared once again in Ben Ghazi (Libya) while on the other, a mosque has been built in Rome for the first time in recent history. If the Qur'an is consulted with this point in view, we find two main principles on which to hold dialogues. One is derived from this verse of the Qur'an:

Say: O People of Book, Let us come to a word common to us and you that we will worship none but God (3:64).

The first and foremost principle for any dialogue held to discuss two or more religions is to strive to find a mutual basis for peaceful co-existence.

It is a fact that finding a common ground in secular matters is comparatively easy, for nothing is held as sacred in secularism. On the contrary everything acquires a sacred character in religion. That is why it becomes the most difficult task to find a basis for agreement in religious matters. However, despite all difficulties, we must continue our efforts, peacefully, irrespective of the results.

The second principle given by the Qur'an is purely a matter of pragmatism. That is, matters should be settled on practical grounds by avoiding their theoretical aspects. This principle is derived from this verse of the Qur'an:

To you your religion and to me mine (109:6).

This principle is generally referred to, in today's context as religious co-existence. This means that whenever common grounds for agreement between two or more parties can not be arrived at on an ideological basis, then the way of practical co-existence must be adopted.

The Community of Saint Egidio provides a good example of a continuing dialogue of this nature. This promotes interaction on a mass scale between adherents of different religions. In view of its vastness it

may be rightly termed a super dialogue. The religious meet held under the auspices of the Community of Saint Egidio on a large scale each year makes a considerable contribution towards the achievement of the goal targetted by inter-religious dialogue.

Here I would like to add another point. We should not judge our efforts in this matter only by the results of meetings held in the name of formally arranged interreligious dialogue. The truth is that "interreligious dialogue" is not now limited to specific meetings held in the field of religion. It has rather assumed the form of a vast historical process-spontaneous, ongoing and perhaps never fully recorded. Negotiation in controversial matter is in tune with the spirit of the age. Today, it has permeated all walks of national as well as international life.

Modern industrial revolution and modern communication have added such vast dimensions to human relations that now the entire world has been converted into a global village. People of various persuasions are coming closer, on a universal scale. This interaction serves as an on-going dialogue of an informal nature. In this way with distances narrowed, the confrontational attitude now gives way to compromise.

Interaction in itself is an unproclaimed dialogue. When, as a result of circumstances, interaction between people of different persuasions increases, the purpose of the dialogue is served or its own.

Today, in educational institutions, offices, and factories, in travel, on playgrounds and in national and international activities adherents of different religious traditions are meeting one another on a scale hitherto unwitnessed.

In the course of this continuous and vast interaction, for the first time in human history, people seem less like strangers to one another. A great gap has been bridged. People are learning one another's languages. They are becoming familiar with one another's culture. Making concessions to one another has become a need of the people themselves.

These factors have brought people closer right across the world. And it is a psychological truth that closeness and interaction in themselves serve the purpose of a practical dialogue. In this way, a natural dialogue has come into existence and has become an on-going process at all times and in all places.

Probably the most signal result of this historical process is that after a long intellectual struggle religious intolerance has been universally rejected. Religious intolerance has now been replaced with complete religious freedom. Today under auspices of the United Nations all the nations of the world have signed the universal declaration of human rights.

In accordance with this declaration religious freedom has been accepted as the natural birth-right of all human beings. As opposed to practices in ancient times, no one now enjoys the right to persecute anyone on the basis of religion. This is the change which has confined the sphere of religious difference to peaceful negotiation.

The effects of this can be seen in all walks of life, whether religious or secular. Every one of us, consciously or unconsciously, plays a part in making religious co-existence a reality.

Interfaith dialogue becoming a part of the historical process holds great promise for us, as in this case its success is assured. This is how every great revolution of history has got under way. Whenever a movement goes beyond the stage of individual or group efforts and joins the historical process itself, then the continuity of that movement is ensured and ultimately nothing can stop it reaching its destination.

In short, inter-religious dialogue had its beginnings in individual interaction, paving the way for discussions held in religious gatherings. Ultimately the time came when it became .a part of a world movement. Now, if the course of events is any indication, God willing, that day too will dawn when the world is no more ridden with religious disputes, and we are able to live in a peaceful and harmonious world.

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Worshipping God and not harming others

Abdullah ibn Masud says that when he asked the Prophet what the best of all actions was, the latter replied "Prayer at the proper time." "And what is the next best" asked Ibn Masud, "Sparing people the harm your tongue can do," was the Prophet's reply. (At- Tabarani)

Islam: The Ideological Super Power

Muslims number more than one billion today. If you go round the world to study the minds of Muslims inhabiting various regions, you will probably come to the conclusion that Muslims all over the world share the feeling that the history of Islam has reached an impasse. Despite enormous sacrifices, no way out is in sight.

It is our firm belief that Islam offers guidance at all times and in all situations. Therefore, it must certainly be able to offer us clear guidance on the present state of affairs. The history of Islam does indeed provide us with two very clear examples of bringing into play the *da'wah* power of Islam.

I. The first guiding example recorded in the early period of Islamic history is that of *Sulh-e-Hudaybiyya*. As we all know, the Prophet of Islam was compelled to migrate from Mecca to Medina. The majority of Muslims followed him. Consequently Medina became a centre of Muslims. However, later events took a more serious turn. The opponents of Islam now started armed onslaughts against the Muslims. Yet after several full-scale wars and many minor armed conflicts, the balance failed to tip on any side. Apparently the history of Islam had reached an impasse.

At this critical juncture, according to the Qur'an, the Prophet of Islam was shown the straight path in this matter (48:3-4). This meant creating an atmosphere conducive to peaceful *da'wah* work by ceasing armed conflicts altogether. Accordingly, the Prophet in the 19th year of his prophethood entered into a peace treaty with his Arab opponents. This step put an end to the state of war. This event is referred to in the history of Islam as *Sulh-e-Hudaybiyya*. This peace treaty changed the area of encounter between Islam and its rivals from the battlefield to the *Da'wah* field.

This peaceful activism brought incredible revolutionary results. The power of peace proved itself far superior to the power of war. This treaty rendered possible a widespread interaction between Muslims and the opposing group in a normal atmosphere. In this way, the peace treaty cleared the path for the direct propagation of Islam to take place. The opponents came to accept Islam in such great numbers, that ultimately, by numerical power alone, Islam became the victor.

According to Imam al-Zuhari, *Sulh-e-Hudaybiyya* was the greatest victory in the history of Islam. Prior to this whenever Muslims and their rivals had encountered one another, fighting had ensued. But after the reconciliation, the state of war ended and peace prevailed. Now former antagonists began meeting one another in a normal, tension-free atmosphere. This interaction naturally led to an exchange of ideas. Whenever anyone heard anything of Islam that he found appealing, he would, without fail, enter its fold. That is why, in a mere two years after the signing of *Sulh-e-Hudaybiyya*, such a large number of people entered the fold of Islam as had never before been witnessed (*Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, vol. 4, p. 170).

This great increase in terms of numbers made Islam a majority religion in Arabia, which greatly facilitated its dominance throughout the land.

2. The second well-known example of the caravan of Islam having reached an impasse came about with the emergence of the brute force of the Tartars in the first half of the thirteenth century. Muslim power was almost completely destroyed by it. It seemed as though the journey of Islam had once again reached a point from which there could be no further advancement.

At exactly that point in time, the ideological power of Islam made its appearance. Muslims, being in no position to take up arms, re-channelized their energies by silently engaging themselves in peaceful *da'wah* work among the victorious Tartars. This act of *da'wah* verified the dictum of the Qur'an that, through *da'wah*, the opponents of Islam would become its supporters and friends (41 :34).

Historians have acknowledged this event in quite clear terms. Philip K. Hitti, for instance, remarks, in his famous book, *The History of the Arabs*:

“The religion of the Muslims had conquered where their arms had failed” (p. 488)

3. Now in the twentieth century the history of Islam appears once again to have reached an impasse. Enormous numbers of sacrifices on our part have yet to succeed in taking forward the caravan of Islam.

According to Al-Imam Malik, the state of affairs of the Muslim Ummah will be reformed only by following the same course of action as that followed by the Muslims of the first phase in order to ameliorate their situation. In the light of this observation, it can be safely said that we must once again opt for this tested method of the past. We must take such steps as will put an end to the hostility prevailing between Muslims and non-Muslims. This would result in a normal situation in which peaceful interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims could fruitfully take place. Hudaybiyya symbolises the greatness of the power of peace as against the power of war. Today, once again, we need to follow a course of action which will create a similar set of circumstances.

As soon as this happens, the ideological power of Islam will at once appear in its full force-which is undoubtedly eternally invincible. Afterwards the virtues of Islam will begin reaching people automatically through exchange and interaction. Then it will also be possible to perform *da'wah* work properly. Under the influence of their own nature people will start joining the ranks of Islam. And there is no doubt about it that the greatest strength for any group depends upon its manpower.

Muslims can be weakened and subjugated at any point in time. But Islam is an ideological superpower forever. It has the capacity to conquer the greatest power on earth through *da'wah*. It is the need of the hour to produce conditions, on a universal scale, conducive to the dissemination of the word of God. It is necessary to bring into play the ideological power of Islam in order that *da'wah* work may be set in motion in the full sense of the word. And then, certainly, Islam will emerge as the dominant and conquering force, and Muslims of the world too will receive their place of honour and glory along with Islam.

Uniform Civil Code—A Critical Study

Even prior to independence, the concept of a uniform civil code was the subject of discussion. Attention is still focussed on this concept, but it is now seen in the larger context of the Constitution of India. (Article No. 44, Uniform Civil Code.) Because of its length and complexity of the constitution, ordinary citizens are baffled by it, and only the legal experts take recourse to it in times of need. The constitutions of most of the developed nations of the modern world are extremely brief. For instance, the constitution of the USA, consists of only 7,000 words. Similarly the constitution of Japan, another highly developed country, is very brief. But the revised constitution of Georgia, an underdeveloped nation, consists of 500,000 words. (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 5/85-86)

The excessive bulk of a constitution results largely from the inclusion of unnecessary articles. Article 44, concerning a common civil code, which comes under the Directive Principles of the State Policy is one of these. This states that the state shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India. This clause is as unconstitutional as saying that the state should attempt to bring about a uniform menu or dress code for all the citizens of the country. The task of the constitution should be to make explicit the fundamental principles on which state policy ought to be based. The idea of a common civil code for the whole country has a long history. It was proposed by Moti Lal Nehru in 1928 in Nehru Report. The *ulama* of that time strongly opposed it. British government refused to accept the report, as it proposed dominion status for India, which was unacceptable to the British. Again in 1939 it was rejected by the congress in Lahore on the ground of its impracticality.

Since 1985, the issue of a uniform civil code has assumed a new dimension with Supreme Court judges beginning to refer to it in their judgements. In his well known judgment in the Mohammad Ahmad-Shah Bano case, Justice Chandrachud felt the need to remark that the enactment of law under Article 44 of the constitution was the demand of the time, as he thought that a common civil code would help the cause of national integration. In May 1995 the two-member division bench of the Supreme Court, Justice Kuldeep Singh and Justice R.M. Sahay in their judgment said: "To introduce a uniform Personal Law (is) a decisive step towards national consolidation ... There is no justification whatsoever in delaying indefinitely the introduction of a uniform personal law in the country" (p. 22). In clause 37 it is clearly stated that the clauses in that part of the constitution are not enforceable by any court of law; they are entirely related to the government and the state. In such circumstances, tampering with Article 44 by Supreme Court judges is inappropriate.

It will be interesting to know what our three former Prime Ministers had to say on the subject. Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, said, "I do not think that at the present moment the time is ripe in India for me to try to push it through." Mrs. Indira Gandhi expressed the same view in her time, and so did, Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao (*The Hindustan Times, The Times of India*, July 28, 1995). How strange it is, that those who are empowered to put the uniform civil code in practice are not in the least interested in doing so, while those who have no authority are vociferously demanding its enactment.

Article 25 exists to contradict Article 44. According to Article 25, "all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion." Furthermore, Article 25, granting religious freedom, appears in that part of the Constitution which deals with the fundamental rights of citizens, whereas Article 44 appears under directive principles. And, according to Clause 37 of the Constitution itself, the clauses under directive principles are dependent upon the clause on fundamental rights. In such circumstances, referring to Article 44 to support a demand that the government legislate on the enforcement of a uniform civil code is against the spirit of the Constitution itself. As long as a group in the country exists which holds such enactment an unjustifiable interference in its religion, it is not constitutionally possible to make such a law. If the parliament were to enact such a law and a religious group in the country appealed against it in the Supreme Court, the court, as guardian of the Constitution, would certainly have to nullify it.

Article 14 of the universal Declaration of Human Rights issued in 1948 by the United Nations, of which India too is a member. This declaration guarantees that every person will enjoy religious freedom, including the freedom to change his religion and follow the religion of his choice. India in signing this declaration, has, as a nation, set its seal of approval on it. Religious liberty, therefore, becomes the right of every Indian citizen.

Article 44 is based on the concept that there is no necessary connection between religion and personal law in a civilised society. While Article 25 guarantees religious freedom. Article 44 seeks to separate religion from social relations and personal law. According to the consensus of scholars of all religions, religion is positively related to three things: faith, worship and ethical values. Marriage is definitely an ethical issue and therefore an integral part of religion. When marriage and divorce are matters of religion, according to Article 25 of the Constitution, neither Parliament nor any other institution enjoys the right to snatch this established right from any group against its will.

The advocates of Uniform Civil Code claim that it would produce a beneficial sense of togetherness, which, in turn, would be conducive to bringing into existence a sense of nationhood. What they forget is that conflicts within the community are more rampant than between the communities. We learn, therefore, as concluded by the Supreme Court's judges themselves, the actual problem is not one of the enforcement of a common code; the problem is that such enforcement is not producing any positive results. Various communities in the country lived together harmoniously, without a common civil code, maintaining their own cultural identity and marrying according to their own religious traditions. The

balance of Indian society was disturbed not by the absence of a common code but by the policy of the former British Government i.e. *divide and rule*. The discord created among two communities by the British lingers on. This is the real cause of the absence of common feeling and not the absence of Uniform Civil Code.

As the events both past and present show Uniform Civil Code is no guarantee against internal strife. Kauravs and Pandavs, despite having the same civil code, waged a large-scale war against each other known as the Mahabharat. In the first World War (1914-18) Germany and Italy were on one side, and Britain and France on the other. Both these parties belonged to the same religion -Christianity. Both followed the same 'civil code,' but this legal uniformity did not prove to be a deterrent to waging a war among themselves. In Punjab, the rift between two communities following the same civil code is too well known. In the courts, tens of thousands of Indians are fighting legal battles against one another, though they adhere to the same civil code.

The truth is that the inability of a uniform civil code in bringing about harmony and unity between people has already been established beyond doubt. There is just no need to put it to the test once again. Totally rejecting the concept of the common civil code, Mr. Balraj Puri writes:

'There is absolutely no logical connection between uniformity and reform – Have not caste-based identities been recognised in the Mandal principle and all identities, cultural, tribal, caste and religious acquired political legitimacy? Why does the honourable judge single out the claim of a religious community for a distinct identity? It defies logic and the socially and politically accepted reality.'

On 20 August 1972 in a special interview with the Organiser Shri M.S. Golwalker, Saranghachalak of RSS, referred to the question of a uniform civil code, and said that such uniformity was not necessary in itself; Indian culture permitted diversity in unity. He said, 'For unity, we need harmony, not uniformity. We in this country have millennia of experience. We have a tested way of life. And our experience is that variety and unity can, and do, go together. Uniformity is the death-knell of nations. Nature abhors uniformity. I am all for the protection of various ways of life.'

The uniform civil code is an impracticable dream. Evidence to support this view exists in the Constitution itself. Article 44 of the Constitution states that the State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India. But an amendment to the same Constitution makes this exception: "No Act of Parliament in respect of religious or social practices of the Nagas, their customary law and procedure, shall apply to the state of Nagaland unless the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland by a resolution so decides." Obviously these clauses are contradictory.

The Shah Bano case, the aim of which was apparently to mete out justice to women. But the practical result was totally different. The Bharatiya Janata Party was then quick to exploit this issue for its own political ends. According to the Hindu Code Bill of 1955, a Hindu is allowed to have only one wife, the Indian census report of 1961 showed that the percentage of Hindus having more than one wife was

more than that of Muslims. The abundance of reform laws has only proved counter-productive. Disputes and strife have greatly increased, and corruption is having a heyday. Obtaining justice has become the most difficult of tasks and the plight of women has, if anything, worsened. This state of affairs calls for finding new strategies to reform society rather than just adding to the number of laws. Making new laws in no way serves as a check against the misuse of old laws. There are laws and regulations to stop tax evasion: nevertheless, tax evasion continues on a very large scale.

Article 44 of the Constitution has no legal meaningfulness or ethical value. It was just a piece of imagination of certain minds. It should be eliminated from the constitution through another amendment. No harm would come from such a move. Our Constitution would rather be relieved of burden.

Two different political groups in India have tried to mould the country along the lines of their own thinking. One favours secular ideology, and the other Hinduism. The ideas of each are totally different from one another yet both are in agreement that India should have a common civil code for all. Can there be a greater paradox?

Secularism means opting for a policy of non-interference by the state in matters of religion. It is along these lines that the Constitution of India has been framed. The other group should know that attempts to bring people belonging to various groups under the same civil code is against its own cherished concepts. The basic principle of Hindu ideology is *sarva dharma sambhava*, that is, all religions are true. One of the fundamental attributes of Hinduism is belief in unity in diversity. Hinduism thus believes in seeing oneness in manyness. It, therefore, goes against the Hindu point of view to attempt to enforce a single civil code by eliminating the personal laws of various groups. The truth is that uniformity in these matters has to do with human history rather than with the law. If through the historical process, a uniform culture comes into existence in a society, a uniform code too will follow. Legislation must follow upon and be in consonance with “ natural trends.

These extremist elements, in a very well-considered move, are disseminating false propaganda that the population of Muslims is increasing at a very rapid pace and that, as a result, by the first half of the next century, Muslims will be in the majority and Hindus will be reduced to a minority in their own country. Painting this frightful picture propagandists are building their vote bank among the Hindus. Birth rates are based on the number of child-bearing women in a society, not on marriages or types of marriages. As Muslim men can marry four women only when the number of women is four times the number of men. But in present-day Muslim society, women do not outnumber men, nor is there any factory to produce women! According to the report of the National Commission on the Status of Women, polygamy is actually less frequent among Muslims than in other communities.

Among Hindus themselves there is no single set of marriage customs. There are hundreds of groups and each performs marriage according to its own family or regional customs and traditions. Almost all Hindus still solemnise their marriages through religious customs, although they are free to choose a civil procedure under the Special Marriages Act of 1954. It is so because marriage belongs to the realm of extremely private matters, in which every community always follows its own family or community traditions and rites.

What is actually needed to make India a united, peaceful and developed country is national character. A national approach is just the opposite of a personal approach. In the latter, importance is attached to individual interests rather than national interests. Whenever there is a clash between the two demands, ideally, individual interest ought to be subordinated to national interest. True patriotism is essential for the advancement of the country. But this is the very thing which does not exist in our country. Patriotism can never be produced from superficial steps like adopting a common civil code. People's thinking will rather have to be turned in a constructive direction. For this we shall have to educate the public by availing all resources. We shall have to launch an ongoing and extensive campaign of intellectual awakening and awareness. This is undoubtedly a monumental task.

One of the clauses under the directive principles of the Constitution states:

'The state shall endeavour to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.' This clause is possibly the most important of all clauses under the directive principles, yet we find that this is the clause which has received the least attention. The Supreme Court has never felt the need to ask the government why it has failed to enforce this clause, even after a period of half a century. The importance of education is so great for the purpose of building the nation that, in comparison, the matter of a common civil code is simply a non-issue. In such a state of affairs our single point programme should be to provide cent per cent education to the population of the country. Its actual importance is that it creates awareness, intellectual awakening. It develops right thinking. Right thinking brings about farsightedness among the people. It tells them how to deal with differences. It gives people the maturity to turn their disadvantages into advantages and differentiate between the good and the bad.

Ten years ago when the Supreme court passed a judgement in the Shah Bano Case Muslims all over the country protested, through rallies and procession which directly benefited the extremist Hindu elements of the country. They need to exercise better judgement and avoid the same mistake, at all cost.

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Three things which must remain inviolate

“A Muslim’s honour, property and blood: no Muslim should violate these things.”

(Hadith)

Islam and the Modern Man - II

Making up for man's helplessness

The course of man's life on earth is such that he is eternally reminded of his helplessness. The educated and the ignorant, the rich and the poor, the great and the weak – all are equal in this respect.

Physically, man is so weak that even a small accident can incapacitate him. He has also to be in a highly balanced geographical situation to survive in this world; he cannot bear any upset in this balance. Moreover, man sees himself as insignificant in comparison to the vast universe in which he lives. In exploring any academic field one soon apprehends that realities are too immense and complex to be encompassed by the limited human intellect. When one sets about any task, one is often confronted by unknown factors which ruin one's aspirations. And if, by chance, one avoids such bitter experience in life, there is no escape from death. Man is powerless before death. Death will come and shatter all his dreams, leaving them in ruins like a fine city which has been razed to the ground by a devastating earthquake.

Every man is plagued by this feeling of helplessness. It compels him to seek the support of something stronger than himself which can make up for his sense of inadequacy. Consciousness of how powerless one is makes one turn towards God. Man needs a God to whom he can express his thanks; a God in whom he can trust on all occasions; a God to depend upon when all the other props in life have failed him; a God who can reverse every setback and ease every hardship. The God of Islam provides for all these needs of man. His presence can always be felt. He is All-Powerful and All-Knowing.

The concept of God in different religions

Man's feeling of helplessness cannot be soothed unless he has a God to whom he can turn. Every religion provides man with some God, but with the exception of Islam, every religion has been spoiled by interpolation and alteration. No religion, except Islam, has preserved a true image of God. They all present an unrealistic picture of the Almighty which cannot fully satisfy man.

Cat Stevens was an internationally renowned pop musician. He was brought up as a Christian, but in 1976 he accepted Islam and is now known as Yusuf Islam. Speaking of his conversion to Islam, he said: 'The Christian Church taught us to believe in God, but the only way to communicate with God was through Jesus – you have no direct contact.' To him, 'the importance of Islam lies in the fact that it acquaints one with a God who speaks directly to the man and his soul.' (*Arabia*, London, July 1983)

Man's nature demands a God whom he can contact directly, but existing religions offer him a God who can be contacted only through some intermediary. Islam is the only religion in which man establishes

direct contact with his Lord. This is because Islam is preserved in its original, revealed form, whereas other religions, having been altered and corrupted by man, are nowhere to be found in their pristine form.

All religions were essentially one and the same at the time of their origin. But now these differ from one another due to human interpolation. (10: 19) Now, some religions have many gods to offer, but this is clearly not what man is looking for. Man is looking for a single being on whom he can focus all his feelings. There can be only one such focal point, not several. Some religions present God in the form of some man. But man is looking for a God who is superior to him; he cannot worship a God who is human like himself. Some religions think of God as no more than a vague spirit. But man is seeking a God who sees and hears and speaks; abstract things like ether and magnetism cannot meet his demands.

Arthur Koestler was a renowned thinker and writer, and had an estate of approximately £400,000. He married three times, but even so he was childless. He was suffering from Parkinson's disease and leukaemia. In utter despair he took his own life at his London residence in March, 1983. He was 77 years old at the time of his death.

Hundreds of such sad events take place everyday all over the world. They happen because people lose hope in their desires being fulfilled in this world. But there are very few cases in history of true believers in God committing suicide. The reason for this is that belief in God gives a person hope for his future in the next world. In God's scheme of things, life is not limited to this world alone; it continues after death as well. When believers are afflicted in this world, they look forward to happiness in the next world. When they despair of the human world, they fix their hopes on the world of God. Thus the distress of a true believer is changed into healthy optimism.

A distorted picture of God

The distorted picture of God which is found in other religions cannot fulfill man's inner yearning. The reason is that man requires a perfect God and these religions provide him with imperfect ones. Some people, compelled by an inner longing for God, attach themselves to false gods, but true spiritual fulfillment can be achieved only through the concept of God presented in Islam. A person who is looking for a car that he can travel in will never be satisfied with a toy car. His needs will only be met if he is provided with a real one. Thus man's heart can be set at rest only when it is filled with thoughts of the true God. In the words of the Qur'an, "In the remembrance of God all hearts are comforted." (Qur'an, 13:28)

Though we cannot behold the Creator in this world, the vast and magnificent universe that He has created is spread out before our eyes. We can see it and experience it. So the human mind can be satisfied only with a God who is worthy of the present universe; a God who is great enough to be the creator of the magnificent universe that meets our eyes. A God who does not come up to these standards can hold no attraction for man.

An American scientist, Walter Oscar Lundberg, has explained this very clearly. He writes that a scientist has a special advantage over others in that he is able to understand God's truth. The basic principles on which he works are in fact an expression of God's existence. If this is the case, then why is it that so many scientists deny the very existence of God? This American scientist is of the opinion that one of the reasons is as follows:

In organised Christianity there is instilled deeply in young people a concept of God created in the image of man rather than of man created in the image of God. When such minds are later trained in science, this reversed and limited anthropomorphic concept gradually becomes more and more incompatible with the rational, inductive attitude of science. Ultimately, when all attempts at reconciliation fail, the concept of God may be abandoned entirely. (*The Evidence of God in an Expanding Universe*, p. 56)

Islam is not a new religion. Originally other religions and Islam were one and the same. But other religions underwent changes and failed to preserve an accurate image of God, whereas in Islam the concept of God has ideally been preserved: it is a picture of God in His most perfect form. The God of Islam is one God; He is Omnipotent; He always was and always will be; He has no partner; He alone has created the universe and He alone sustains it; He sees, hears and speaks; He is always near to answer the supplication of His servant; at no time or place is He parted from man; He helps man through every difficulty of this world and the next. The Qur'an introduces us to this perfect God. Whoever wishes to know God can do so only through the Qur'an.

Society

All the nations in present times, be they developed or underdeveloped, are faced with social problems. Human society everywhere is marked by tyranny and injustice, and people are faced with the question of how to reorganise society in order to establish a better human existence.

In the study of the human predicament, what strikes us time and again is that man is still confronted with the necessity to solve his problems in a world where all other things have had their problems definitively solved from day one. This goes to prove that man has gone astray in the thoroughfare of the universe. If he had followed the same thoroughfare as the rest of God's creation, his problems too would have been solved in like manner.

All the things in existence in the universe are governed by the same universal law. But man wants to adopt a separate path for himself. All the things of the universe survive by being of benefit to others, whereas man wants to build his future on the exploitation of others. The tall objects in the universe cast their shadow on the ground in acknowledgement of their modesty, while any form of greatness achieved by man makes him arrogant. Everything in the universe is busy in its own tasks, and does not interfere in others' spheres, while man clashes with others, attempting to construct himself out of the destruction of others. In the universe floods occur which if given their freedom would wreak havoc, but the system of

the universe diverts their course to the rivers and the seas. On the contrary, when man experiences such tempests in the form of negative feelings, he does not divert them to a positive course. Man wants others to suffer on his behalf.

If the ills of society are to be remedied, an end should be put to this contradiction. That is, human society should be made to follow the same universal system which is strictly adhered to by the universe. The day this happens, all the problems of human life will be solved. When the observance of God's law has solved the problems of the universe, why should the observance of that same law by man not succeed in solving human problems?

Social Problems

What is society? It is in actual fact another name of a group of individuals. The behaviour of society is an aggregate of the behaviour of its individuals. If individuals are good, society likewise will be good. If individuals are not good, society will reflect their shortcomings.

The concept of God gives each member of society the most morally correct viewpoint. Its perception engenders in each individual such seriousness as enable him or her to do what is beneficial for the whole of mankind, and to refrain from acting to its disadvantage.

Belief in God is the greatest of discoveries. It galvanises one's entire personality. This can be illustrated by the example of the game of carom-board which is played with 19 pieces arranged at the middle of a square board with holes at each corner. If a player can hit these pieces with a striker in such a way that they are all thrown into all the four holes at one stroke, he is said to have played a Master Stroke. Belief in God too is a kind of master stroke.

Belief in God affects a man's whole being, bringing into play all of his forces. Although apparently just one aspect of human thinking, such belief reforms the entire human being, so that regardless of how he gives expression to his personality, he will always bow to the norms of rectitude. Indeed, the conviction that man's whole existence is in the grip of God, has a thorough-going influence on all of the individual's thoughts, words and deeds. The true believer will never deviate from the straight path of nature.

Paying attention to the body alone, while abandoning the soul, does not produce an integrated personality. The consciousness of this lack keeps the individual constantly dissatisfied, with the feeling that he has failed to find something that he really wanted.

It is this feeling of deprivation which in most cases is the cause of social evils. All tyranny and injustice in society are traceable to this discontent of some being vented on others. People continue to exploit others in order to satisfy their unfulfilled wishes. But, when belief in God takes root in the mind, it turns the man into a complex free soul, (called a peaceful or serene soul in the Qur'an) no longer suffering from an inferiority complex about having fewer worldly things than others or from a superiority complex at being granted more. Under all circumstances, with his new, well integrated personality, he remains a moderate person and that is what makes a man a better member of a society.

A new element in his mental make up is the feeling of responsibility. This feeling is always produced when he is aware of a power above him, which can take him to task. Over and above God, there is no such superior power as will induce a sense of accountability on man, forcing him to abide by the truth.

Belief in Almighty God produces an awareness in man that he is answerable to Him, which in turn makes him extremely cautious in his words and deeds. The possession of the new awareness is like having a guardian angel which organises his whole life. It turns him away from the perpetration of tyranny and expectation, and forces him to stick to the path of goodness and justice. The well-known English judge, Sir Matthew Hale, (1609-1676) has very aptly observed: "To say that religion is a cheat is to dissolve all those obligations whereby civil societies are preserved." (Quoted by Julian Huxley, in *Religion Without Revelation*, p. 155)

Religion Without Revelation

When the majority of the members of a society come to accept the Islamic concept of God in their lives, a tremendous change takes place in social matters. This awareness that God is watching puts an end to double standards and hypocritical stance that inside a man is different from what he is outside. Believers do not exploit others as they know that they will have to account for their deeds in God's court. Their lives, instead of remaining self oriented, become God-oriented. To believe in God is to believe in an almighty being who has access to the innermost recesses of the human mind, and who will take an account of all acts done openly or covertly. In this way belief in God takes away a person's ego and haughtiness. The believer is totally sincere and is a realist in the true sense. This is the secret of all kinds of reform. If a man is sincere and realistic, he will perform all tasks in the most proper way, but if he lacks these qualities, he will mar everything that he undertakes. The Islamic concept of God produces this sincerity and realism in man.

All human beings in our world are not equal. Here some are weak, others strong; this difference is the cause of all the injustice prevalent in the world, for those who feel themselves powerful tend to exploit those who appear weaker than themselves.

Belief in God roots out this evil from man. Belief in God tells man that the actual issue is not between man and man, but between God and man. Here, on the one hand is God, the all powerful, and, on the other is man who has no power as compared to God. It is as if the division here is not between the less powerful and the more powerful, but between power and powerlessness. (35: 15)

Belief in God transforms man's thinking. He begins to look at things not in relation to human beings but in relation to God. This is because, ultimately he knows he has to face his Maker. This is an attitude which causes the disappearance of whatever tyrannical mentality had artificially surfaced as a result of seeing everything, not in relation to God but in relation to man. The believer thus comes down to his actual level. He becomes a man cut to size.

In a controversy arising between two persons or two nations, both in most cases, are at fault. In such a state of affairs, if one party admits its mistakes the other party too follows suit. On the contrary if one party remains adamant, the other party becomes equally unwilling to admit its own faults. This leads to an escalation of the strife, until it reaches a point of no return.

In all such cases, the actual problem is that no sooner does a quarrel start than both the parties turn it into a prestige issue. Each party knows that it shares the blame, yet it refrains from saying so, for any such outright admission would be humiliating in the extreme.

But if one of them were to take the initiative in admitting its mistakes, the state of affairs would change drastically. That prestige issue would now turn into an issue of balance. Now, with the admission of a mistake by one party, the other party, in admitting its errors would not be eating humble pie but simply following what the other party had already done. That is to say such an admission by one of the parties would induce its rival to adopt a balanced approach in advance.

Such realism, the mainspring of a reformed life, is attainable only through sincere worship of God, self-effacement before His greatness and avowal of one's own insignificance and lack of perfection. This realism is the mark of the true believer, one who believes in God when God in fact is not visible before us, how could a person of such faith and practice deign to occupy himself with matters of worldly prestige?

The system of nature follows the principle of balance. One of the strategies resorted to by nature to maintain this balance is diversion, or the redistribution of excessive amounts of force or energy. For instance, if all the water that comes down to earth in the form of rains were stored in the fields and settlements, an immeasurable strain would be placed on the environment. What nature does in this case is to divert all the spare accumulated water to the rivers and seas.

It is this principle of diversion which has been followed in the building of dams. Designed mainly for storage purposes, dams have a regulatory role in the environment, controlling flood waters and diverting them to useful ends, such as irrigation and the production of hydro-electricity . The same principle is followed in machines, like the steam engine. When the quantity of steam exceeds the required amount and too much pressure builds up, the steam is in a sense diverted by being allowed to escape through a safety valve.

In social life, there is a somewhat similar build-up of stresses and strains. When a number of people live together, it is but natural for complaints and grudges to surface between them. If these negative sentiments are allowed to escalate, discord and enmity are bound to develop. When that stage is reached, it becomes almost impossible to reform a human group or society.

In such a state of affairs some such thing is required towards which these harmful feelings may be diverted. Belief in God and the Life Hereafter serves this very purpose in life. It diverts those feelings, which are harmful to society, to God.

In the early history of Israelites, there is the story of Joseph, who was separated from his father by his stepbrothers. Later, the same happened with Yamin, another real brother of Joseph. He too, without his father's knowledge, was separated from him. These were terrible losses for Yaqub, the father, and it was but natural that he should be intensely miserable. Had he vented his negative feelings on his stepsons, there would have been great dissension and discord in his family. Instead, he diverted all this flood of feelings to God saying: 'I express my grief and sorrow to God.'

There was a similar diversion of negative feeling when Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab dismissed the Islamic General Khalid ibn al-Walid. It was a rude shock to Khalid, but he redirected his hurt feelings to God, saying: 'I fight not for the cause of Umar, but for the cause of God.'

Belief in the life Hereafter is the greatest gift to human society. It enables man to turn to God to seek compensation for the wrong done to him. Whatever he has failed to find in man he can expect to find that in God. In this way a God-worshipper's negative feelings keep getting diverted to God instead of to man. The flood superabundance of water which would have caused great harm in the form of a flood is channelised into a diversion pool. I should like to conclude this with an observation made by George Bernard Shaw: "If a man like Muhammad were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world, he would solve its problems in a way that would bring it much-needed peace and happiness."

The life of the Prophet Muhammad was a perfect example of what a true believer's life should be. But we need to go further than Bernard Shaw and say that "if true believers were born in this world, peace would certainly prevail – which should be our first priority."

Unfailing obedience to one's commander

The Prophet once sent a military unit led by 'Amr ibn al- As, to Dat as-Salasil, Abu Bakr and Umar being of its number. When they had advanced as far as the site of the battle, they pitched camp, whereupon Amr ibn al-'As gave orders that no fires should be lit. Angered at what struck him as an unnecessary inconvenience, 'Umar got up to go and see 'Amr ibn al-'As about it, but Abu Bakr stopped him, saying: "The Prophet appointed him commander over you for the simple reason that his knowledge of military tactics is greater than yours."

(Al-Baihaqi, *As-Sunan al-Kubra*)